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NASA Earth Science

June 15, 2006

Kinds of audiences --

Audiences that need the information (badly written stories on cancer), professional need.

Audiences that have specific curiosity (geology buffs will look up geology sites and study them.

Audiences that have neither knowledge or need, but which may be your constituency.

The attraction of information on one end of the spectrum and narrative on the other. General audiences and narrative. What narrative means. Narrative is action within context. Its key distinguishing features are significant human struggle and the context for that struggle. In narrative the factual material is background and the human material is foreground. This does NOT mean the factual material gets short shrift; it's more like the dramatic human material is a carrier wave.

What I expected to find:

Something that would give me a dramatic overview of how cameras in space changes science from archaeology to geology. Probably something fairly sophisticated, since we expect that from nasa. It is also a pretty fundamental piece of the scientific narrative.

I did NOT expect to find that the average person, or the non-science reporter, would have put much if any thought into the issue.

Where I looked:

Web: googled the obvious

Interviewed reporters

What I found:

Reporters: Nobody knew anything.

Web sites focused on include:

<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/>

<http://www.earth.nasa.gov/>

found "earth observing system"

My conclusions

What I see on various sites ranges from very dense and difficult bureaucratic stuff to moderately difficult stuff. If one explores, there's some interesting stuff. However, it is difficult to explore because the mind zones out quickly. I had to force myself to keep coming back to earth observatory five times before I really realized what the site meant. If I hadn't been assigned to do it, I wouldn't have.

Web chauvinism. Hyperlinks but no narrative. Even stories about scientists contain no narrative. Couches in terms of what we should do.

A political view. I'm aware of your political problems. Earth observatory is rich with subjects that are hot politically. This is a dangerous strategy.

My recommendations

- Define what you want to accomplish

- If you want to build a more general constituency, think through your narratives

Possible narratives:

- How nasa learned to use data on earth

- How earth sciences data has changed archaeology

- How earth sciences data has changed X

And, of course, get the help of professional writers.